

Safety isn't just about security; it's about transforming entire system and culture: Actor Padmapriya

At TRI's #NoExcuse - Rural Youth Speak Out for 16 days of Activism Against Gender Violence

Lawyer Flavia Agnes, grassroots activist Taniya Khan and Activist Prabhleen Tuteja engaged with rural youth and women in a powerful virtual session

UJALA SHIKHAR

Prayagraj: Transform Rural India (TRI) organised a virtual session, #NoExcuse - Rural Youth Speak Out on Safety where youth and women from rural areas addressed systemic gender-based violence (GBV) and shared lived experiences. Featuring actor Padmapriya, women's rights lawyer Flavia Agnes and social justice activist Prabhleen Tuteja as key speakers, the session was attended by rural participants and youth across the country, mainly from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand via TRI's Youth Resource Hubs and Nari Adhikar Kendras. TRI organised the dialogue session as part of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the an-

nual international civil society-led campaign that begins on November 25 on the International Day of Elimination of Violence against Girls and Women, and concludes on December 10, Human Rights Day.

The discussions underscored the importance of this year's campaign, particularly in light of the upcoming 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Women (BPOA), which will be marked at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2025. While India has enacted laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, to address domestic violence, recent studies, such as 'Ambivalent Sexism and

Tolerance of Violence Against Women in India' published in Psychological Science journal, reveal troubling insights. The report highlights how patronising beliefs framed as protective measures often reinforce power imbalances, leaving women more vulnerable to violence by subordinating them to their male partners. The virtual dialogues also brought attention to the need for effective measures to prevent GBV from resulting in long-term physical and mental health impacts on the survivors. It also called for refined policies that prioritise the socio-economic development of victims, ensuring they are not getting marginalised.

"Addressing the issue of safety is not just about



safety alone. It is about transforming the entire system, including the culture, which needs to change", says actor Padmapriya. Af-

ter debuting in Malayalam cinema with Blessy's 'Kaaazhcha', the actor played a pivotal role in establishing the Women in Cinema

Collective (WCC) following the 2017 actor assault case that shook Bollywood. Efforts by women in Malayalam cinema, including Padmapriya, led to the formation of the Hema Committee, which highlighted the injustices faced by women in the industry. Seema Bhaskaran, Senior Practitioner, Gender, Inclusion and Diversity at TRI, emphasised the significance of creating platforms for such critical conversations. She remarked, "This is just one of many sessions where TRI aims to bring forth and address difficult but necessary topics to create real change."

Speakers at the session also highlighted the need for concrete strategies to address GBV in India and

reduce the underreporting of such incidents. They also emphasised the need for stronger laws, improved protocols, and greater awareness of women's rights so that more women can come forward and report crimes against them.

"Many women don't realise that what they are experiencing constitutes violence. Thus, women must have the agency to recognise this and understand that there are many avenues available for them to seek help, such as the Nari Adhikari Kendras," says Taniya Khan, Coordinator at a Nari Adhikari Kendra Coordinator in Barwani, Madhya Pradesh.

"Today, we have many rights for women - thanks

to the demands put forward by women's movements. However, we have come to realise that laws alone are not enough, there needs to be awareness", says Flavia Agnes, women's rights lawyer.

With the increasing number of incidents related to both online and offline sexual abuse, the women leaders emphasised the need for greater efforts to raise awareness about preventing GBV. TRI plans to launch more video campaigns, share information on local social media platforms and WhatsApp groups and organise village-level awareness activities. Further, it will also focus on equipping rural women with practical tips for safe internet usage.

